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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses various theories of developmental psychology, and presents a developmental theory of socialization founded upon the following premises: (1) that a materialistic theory of development and socialization must incorporate not only ecological aspects but also underlying political/economic dynamics of the society in which and for which the theory is developed; (2) that a developmental theory of socialization must be dialectic in order to be relevant to all internal and external factors and contradictions of a given societal system; and (3) that in order to analyze the totality of adolescent behavior, the theory must encompass the whole prism of behavioral aspects. Behavior and action of adolescents must be viewed from at least three dimensions: association, dissociation, and disorientation. Different social classes of adolescents find expression in different tendencies of behavior and action. A pilot study of adolescents in Northern Germany is described. It concludes that the behavior and self-concepts, especially of working-class adolescents, are not adequately recognizable as long as the theories of psychological development include scientific biases toward this group. (Author/JLL)

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Implications of Development On Adolescents' Behavior and Self-Concepts

A Paper Presented at the
83rd American Psychological Association Convention

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Implications of Development On Adolescents' Behavior and Self-Concepts

Theories of developmental psychology have played an eminent role within the history of psychology (Freud, 1905; Piaget, 1926). These theories have also influenced a variety of other theoretical positions, both within and outside the field (e.g., Vygotsky, 1962; Habermas, 1976). Furthermore, theories of development have exercised an important impact in a number of praxis-relevant areas (e.g., Educational Psychology, jurisdiction of juvenile defendants, school entrance testing, planning of curriculum, etc.).

The implied importance of the relationship between these theories and other theoretical positions have so far hidden possible shortcomings or negative effects. However, the discussions of developmental theories are beginning to yield to a more progressive, critical, and realistic view (Schurian & ter Horst, 1976). So far however, these critical voices are in a minority.

As a whole, developmental theory still draws heavily upon the following premises: (a) Development as a biological/genetic predetermined unfolding process, (b) development as a cognitive/social-cognitive interaction process, (c) development as the result of social interactions.

Although these premises prepared for the explosive progression of the field of developmental psychology, they

imply two particular sources of error.

1. In the face of the present rate of social change and social evolution (i.e., rapid progression of "productive forces" [Schurian & ter Horst, 1976]), developmental psychology has in the form of instincts, drives, needs, etc., over-exercised its eminent impact on the field.

2. The "social norms" and "systems" approaches have not sufficiently differentiated themselves into their real elements. That is, even those theorists who are leaning toward the environment as the main determinant in development, have not sufficiently operationalized what they mean by social systems, cultural systems, reality principle, etc.

Faced with such problems and faced with the discrepancy between the real behavior of children and adolescents and the theories that purport to explain their behavior, one must search for other models to explain development and socialization.

Theory

Based upon theories proposed by Holzkamp (1972, 1973), Leontjew (1973), Riegel (1975), and Schurig (1975, 1976), one can arrive at a revised theory of development and socialization (Schurian & ter Horst, 1976): a theory in which previously mentioned errors can be resolved. Such a "developmental theory of socialization" is founded upon the following premises: (a) that a materialistic theory of development and socialization must incorporate not only ecological aspects (Bronfenbrenner, 1975) but rather the

underlying polit/economic dynamics of the society in which and for which the theory is developed, (b) that a developmental theory of socialization must be dialectic (i.e., not only in the sense of polit/philosophical alternatives but rather in being open, dissipative, flexible, etc.) in order to be relevant to all internal and external factors and contradictions of a given societal system and (c) that in order to analyze the totality of adolescents' behavior, the theory must encompass the whole prism of behavioral aspects. These range from innerpsychic behavior to extra-psychic social acting.

When comprising these premises into a theory of development, one arrives at the following conclusions:

1. That a developmental theory of socialization needs to draw its normative references from the bases of socio/political analysis as elaborated in economics as "productive forces", (i.e., progressive forces of men and society, history of development of work and labor, automation, cooperation, phylogenetic development and evolution of homo-sapiens through work, etc.) and "production", (i.e., actual ownership and conditions of ways and means of economic production, hierarchical structures, order of command, etc.).

2. That developmental theories abandon the pervasive principle of homeostasis in order to incorporate the principle of dissipation. That is, "order through fluctuation" (Jantsch, 1975; Jantsch & Waddington, 1976)

3. That the development and socialization of

adolescents be analyzed from three aspects: These are (a) "behavior" (e.g., innerpsychic processes [internalization] based upon neurological and physiological actions and reactions, covert behaviors, idiosyncratic traits, etc.), (b) "behavior patterns" (e.g., an intermediate link between behavior and action, areas of identity, attitudes, sexuality, etc.), and (c) "action or acting" (e.g., social interaction, actual performance, overt behavior, interindividualism, etc.).

Implications

If the above mentioned aspects and premises are taken into consideration, one arrives at the following implications in regard to these analyses of the actual behavior categories of adolescents. These are:

1. association
2. dissociation
3. disorientation

The innovative aspects of such implications lie in the fact that behavior and action of adolescents must be viewed from at least three dimensions. This factor clearly contradicts most traditional views which perceive adolescents' behavior as unidimensional (e.g., viewing adolescents' behavior as a more or less homogeneous occurence and the group of adolescents as a more or less homogeneous grouping). With specific regard to adolescents as a group, this means that the behavior and actions of different social groups find their expression in different tendencies of

behavior and acting (see Figure 1).

Pilot Study

In support, a group of adolescents was systematically and un-systematically observed for a period of two years. The setting was that of a "youth-center"--a communal institution established and run by the adolescents themselves. The youth center was located in a small/medium sized town in Northern Germany. In addition, a selected group of adolescents from the working-class and middle-class backgrounds were presented with four plates of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), (I; 3 BM; 9 BM; 14). The stories obtained from those four plates were analyzed by content analysis in respect to the categories of "association", "dissociation", and "disorientation" and in respect to the profession and/or education of the adolescents and their socioeconomic backgrounds.

The results clearly indicate the following groupings:

- working class adolescents = tendency toward associative behavior superimposed by the tendency of disorientation
- middle class adolescents = strong tendency toward dissociative behavior; sporadic tendencies toward disorientation

Discussion

It has been argued that a developmental theory of socialization can be relevant only if all personal and social aspects of behavior are encompassed. This means,

however, that the given social polarities, particularly in a capitalistic society, must find their expression in such a theory. The existing class differences must penetrate into the differences in behavior and acting. One can distinguish between at least three types of categories of behavior and action: association, dissociation, and disorientation. Whereas association refers to the behavior of members of the working class, middle class individuals indicate dissociative behavior patterns. However the prevailing patterns are disorientation; this is particularly true for the group of adolescents as a whole.

If a theory of development and socialization is to be relevant for a given population at a given time, the theory must reveal the existing social polarities and the implicit/explicit contradictions of such societal polarities. A theory that fails to do so, a theory that postulates social norms as a referential totality (Parsons, 1951; Eisenstadt, 1956) is incomplete. Such a theory must discriminate those individuals it purports to explain (Schurian, 1976).

Therefore, it can be assumed that the behavior and self-concepts, especially of working-class adolescents, are not adequately recognizable as long as the theories of psychological development include scientific biases toward this group. The overwhelming majority of developmental theories, both in West Germany and the United States, include a pejorative and almost condescending attitude toward the development and socialization in the "lower class" (e.g.,

child rearing practices, life space, milieu, neighborhood, language codes, etc.). These theories are therefore unable to perceive any positive potential of behavior. Because of this, most of the theories and models in the social sciences must be reanalyzed. Their bases of argumentation and operation should be reconceptualized in such a way as to include differentiated models for the adequate perception of highly complex patterns of behavior.

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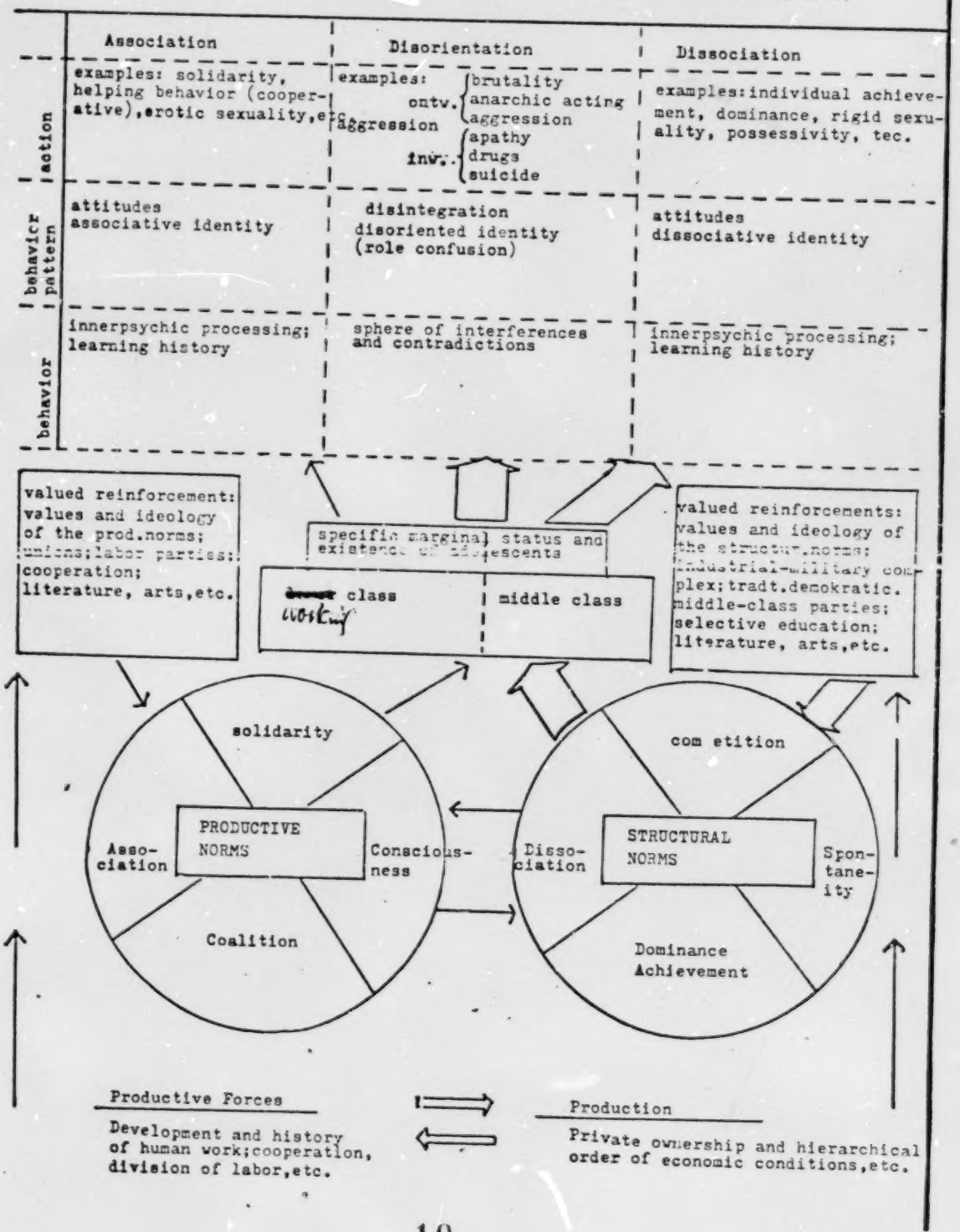
Fig.1: Behavior, acting and social norms

(Schurian,W.& ter Horst,K.W. Autorität und Jugend.München,1976.)



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